

Council on Foreign Relations

Approved For Release 2001/07/26 : CIA-RDP68B00432R000500010001-9

Examining an Establishment Member

By Flora Lewis

Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW YORK, May 28—"You all have a certain status in being here," John J. McCloy told some 800 black-tied men at a sober New York dinner this week. He chuckled at his own joke. "You all realize that the Council on Foreign Relations is a member of the Establishment."

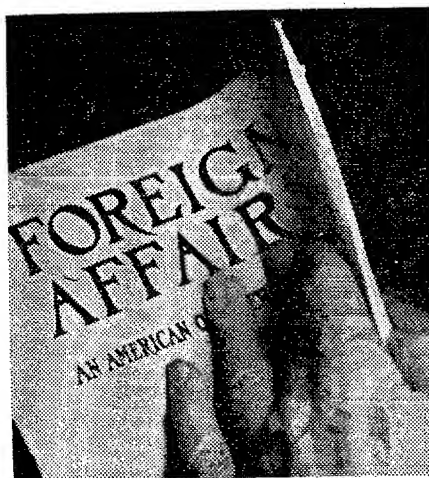
Silently, without expression, a man at one of the tables well back from the dais pushed a dollar bill towards the man beside him and paid his bet.

His neighbor pushed it back between them. "I'll make it double or nothing," he whispered. "I bet you Rusk uses the word 'Establishment' in the first four sentences of his speech."

McCloy was still making his waspish introduction: "... A Phi Beta Kappa, a Rhodes scholar, just a little more and he'd be classified as an intellectual. And then where would he be?..."

When the Secretary of State stood up to speak he was beaming.

"It is a great pleasure for me to meet once again with the Council on Foreign Relations," he began. "By law, I



The bible of the Establishment

am a member of the Establishment..."

A second dollar bill was immediately placed beside the first and the winner scooped them up. "I should have known," the loser mouthed.

But Rusk had not finished with the

point. He went on to say that if he had brought fraternal Establishment greetings from the State Department, "I would disappoint the Establishment watchers. The eight highest officials in our business were born in..." and he proceeded to list the non-power wielding states, the non-Ivy League colleges from which his top associates had come.

He rattled them all off in the tones of a bemused society editor deciding to read out the list at the bottom of the column beginning "among those also present were..."

The ballroom full of men (three newspaperwomen had been admitted on sufferance because it was one of the all-male Council's rare public gatherings) applauded and laughed appreciatively. Then they settled back importantly for the long policy speech on Vietnam.

It was a remark of John Kenneth Galbraith, former Ambassador to India, calling the Council a kind of concealed foreign policy establishment that had provoked all the high-level cracks. But the sensitivity of the response clearly

See COUNCIL, A6, Col. 4

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Sunday, May 29, 1966 THE WASHINGTON POST

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AN AMERICAN QUARTERLY REVIEW



APRIL 1966

The Faceless Viet Cong George A. Carver, Jr. 347
Rhodesia in the Context of Southern Africa . . . Julius K. Nyerere 373
Communist Dilemma for China

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Published quarterly by Council on Foreign Relations, Inc. Editorial and Business Offices,
58 East 68 Street, New York, N.Y. 10021. All mail including subscription orders, to be sent to this address.

COUNCIL—From Page A1

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came from a shared sense that, after all, there might be something in what Galbraith had said.

The Council has 1400 members—average age 60, average wealth undoubtedly staggering — carefully selected to compose a kind of leadership elite in American foreign affairs. There is a large segment of Wall Street, some midtown tycoons, the more eminent radio and newspaper executives, a sprinkling of academic people dealing with really big foreign investors.

They don't, as a body, actually decide anything, or recommend anything, or lobby for anything. They simply listen in private to speeches by very important or very knowledgeable people, attend seminars and small dinners, support the solemn quarterly "Foreign Affairs" and a series of research projects that lead to scholarly but not too abstruse publications.

"Just highly sophisticated adult education," is what David W. Maceachron, the Council's program director, called it.

But an elderly banker whispered as Rusk went on with his speech, "You can be sure Rusk means it when he says he's glad to be here.

He feels at home. It was McCloy and Robert Lovett who got him his job. (President) Kennedy had never met Rusk before they persuaded him to make the appointment."

At the head table, 29 heads (13 bald, 10 gray, 6 brown or sandy) were listening to the Secretary. They all had known him for years, from his days as head of the Rockefeller Foundation and because they were in any case men accustomed to being on intimate terms with the American Secretary of State.

Allen Dulles, former chief of the Central Intelligence Agency, seemed to snooze a little as the familiar recital of postwar policy went on. But he straightened with a jerk when Rusk mentioned his brother, the late John Foster Dulles.

There were questions, polite ones beginning with "Would you care to comment on . . ." when the speech was over. Nothing startling happened. No discreet but firm pressures were applied. There was nothing but the well-known heads for the TV cameras to catch as a reflection of behind-scenes power.

Afterwards, a few of the men went on to a quiet bar for a drink and an amiable chat.

"The point is," one said,

"all the rest of the countries in the area. You have to be sure to make the circuit every time you go to have a look at Saigon. It's the effect on the others that really matters. That's where these people who just talk about Vietnam go wrong."

"Yes," said another. "We were talking about that at one of our little Council dinners last week. David (Rockefeller) and Tom (Finletter) felt the same way. They tell me the President was quite pleased to hear it."

It came out that someone practically always comes up from Washington for the "little dinners"—not to talk but to listen as eight or ten of the country's biggest bankers, lawyers, corporation heads, chat about the state of the world.

If they have something to urge on government, they do it privately, through the network of friendships and long-concerted contacts. In that sense, the Council doesn't matter; it is no establishment of corporate weight, no organized hotline.

But as men of serious affairs, they like to have serious-sounding information without the frills of mass popularization. The Council helps provide it in digestible form. As men who are conscious that they matter, they

like to have the views of other men who matter and see that their own are heard. The Council helps provide that opportunity in privacy, dignity and comfort.

In that sense, it is a mighty club, an Establishment. They don't make foreign policy;

no President since the war has been less involved, less connected with their club, drawn less on their coterie for top advisers. Still, they do exist and they're ready and willing to provide influence. Above all, when it comes to providing influence, they are able.